TC 1814

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

ACTION ALERT

USCC Department of Social Justice and World Peace
3211 Fourth Street N.E., Washington, DC 20017-1194
Tel: (202) 541-3180 Fax: (202) 541-3339

EAST TIMOR

BACKGROUND: Now, almost three years since the massacre of some 150 to 275 peaceful marchers at the Santa Cruz cemetery in Dili, severe human rights abuses continue in this Indonesian-occupied territory. In recent communications, Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo of Dili has called for genuine peace talks to alter a situation that he has termed a hell. "Christians are constantly being arrested, beaten and intimidated by police," he said in July. In incidents described by international news media as the most serious since the 1991 Santa Cruz killings, Indonesian troops injured many young East Timorese protesting official harrassment and acts of desecration directed against the local church.

The US Administration has taken some further steps to address the situation in this largely Catholic former Portuguese colony whose population has been decimated since the 1975 Indonesian invasion. In July 1993, President Clinton raised the issue of human rights in East Timor in a meeting with Indonesian President Suharto and, in mid-1994, the Administration banned the sale of certain kinds of US arms that could be used by Indonesian forces for repressive purposes. The government has also provided encouragement for the UN-sponsored talks between Indonesia and Portugal on human rights and the political status of East Timor.

USCC POSITION: On July 26, 1994, Bishop Daniel Reilly, Chairman of the Committee on International Policy, issued a statement of solidarity with the Church in East Timor, expressing renewed concern over the difficulties being experienced by many in that area, and calling for intensification of the UN discussions, which the Holy See has also and repeatedly encouraged.

ACTION REQUESTED: In mid-November, President Clinton will visit Indonesia for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit, to be followed with a formal state visit with Indonesian President Suharto. Dear Colleague letters are now circulating in the House (initiated by Reps. Hall and Wolf) and in the Senate (Sens. Pell and Wallop), inviting Members to sign on to letters urging Mr. Clinton to press President Suharto on the matters of human rights violations and the intimidation of Catholic leaders, and on the pressing need for steps leading to reconciliation and a UN-sponsored settlement of the conflict in East Timor. Letters to UN Secretary Boutrous-Ghali are also circulating in both Houses.

PLEASE CALL/FAX YOUR SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES URGING THEM TO CO-SIGN BOTH LETTERS. DEADLINE IS THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1994

For further information, call Tom Quigley:(202) 541-3184 9/94